

44 SMILE ZOLA, NOVELIST AND REFORMER

bank, after bathing, they acted some scenes together.¹ In-
deed, they knew entire plays, and on the way home, in the twilight, they would adapt their steps to the rhythm of those lines which were sonorous like trumpet-blasts. But a day came when one of them produced a volume of Alfred de Musset's poems, the perusal of which set their hearts quivering. From that hour their worship for Hugo received a great blow, his lines fled from their memories, and Musset alone reigned over them. He became their constant companion in the hollows, the grottoes, the little village inns where they rested; and, again and again, they read "Kolla" or the * Nights/' aloud.²

Thus their young natures awoke to love. Cdzanne and Bailie were then about eighteen years of age; Zola was seventeen. But their aspirations remained full of ideality. There were a few brief, uncertain attempts at love-making, nipped in the bud by circumstances. Already, before the time we have now reached, Zola, or his musically minded friend Marguery, or perhaps both, had nursed a boyish, flame for the fair-haired daughter of a local haberdasher, and had serenaded her in company, the former with his clarionet, the latter with a *cornet-k-piston*, until one evening the indig-nant parents emptied their water-jugs over

them.

Later

Zola dreamt of encountering "fair beings in his rambles,

beautiful maidens, who would suddenly spring up in some strange wood, charm him for a whole day, and melt into air at dusk."³ And at last a young girl, Gratienne, flits by in the moonlight near the Clos des Chartreux, with her heavy

¹ Zola's " Nos Auteuis Dramatiqties," p. 42.

² "Documents Litt[^]raires," p. 90.

* "L'CEuYre/'Ciiap. II.